

# Finding ‘new’ geographies in dedications, acknowledgements, and citations

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In his translator’s introduction to *For a New Geography* Archie Davies highlights the many guises of Milton Santos – from powerhouse of Brazilian geography, through to radical geographer of international standing. However, my engagement with Santos falls into another category: ‘the English-language Milton Santos, a much more fragmented, uncertain and emergent figure’ (Davies, 2021). Santos has certainly been talked about and written about more widely in English-language settings over the past few years (see Davies, 2021; Ferretti, 2020; Ferretti and Viotto Pedrosa, 2018; Melgaço, 2017). However, I was particularly curious to engage with this new translation as it contributes to a wider push to diversify and decolonise the histories of geography, which have tended to reinforce Anglo-American hegemony.

Rather than outlining Santos’s vision for a ‘new’ geography in his book, this piece starts from the more ephemeral elements of the text: the dedication, the acknowledgements, and the citations. As I have argued, in work exploring the experiences and contributions of geographers in Nigeria, these can provide insights into academic careers, lives and connections, and by extension the wider ‘doing’ of geographical scholarship beyond the intellectual work of the text itself (see Craggs and Neate, 2019, 2020).

The first point to make is how the acknowledgements in the book highlight past (often overlooked) patterns of academic mobility and sites of knowledge production. Tucked away at the end of the text Santos explains how:

‘Between 1974 and 1977, I worked at the Universities of Dar-Es-Salaam, in Tanzania, the University of Venezuela, in Caracas, and Columbia University, in New York. My many discussions with students made a huge contribution to the development of the ideas explored here.’ (Santos 2021 [1978]: 169).

This refers to the period when Santos was in exile and unable to work in Brazil, and paints a picture of an itinerant academic life. However, the acknowledgements also reveal a different geography of academic geographical careers than we are often familiar with in the UK. Santos worked in places that are quite often either forgotten about or glossed over in rather narrowly defined frames that mark the boundaries of so-called ‘international’ geography. These are boundaries that were already laid out when Santos was writing, and of which he was well aware, as we can see in his discussions of ‘official geography’ as a ‘geography that controls both the means of the diffusion of knowledge (editors of magazines and books, international and national associations, congresses, and so on) and the means of the production of knowledge (such as grants research resources)’ (Santos 2021 [1978]: 64). This was an author who was acutely

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aware of obstacles and imbalances in how geography was practiced, by whom, and where this happened. These were observations informed by a type of international academic mobility that was relatively common in the mid-twentieth century, which included a two year stop off in East Africa.

When Santos was based at Dar-es-Salaam it was an exciting time, a period when Tanzania's status as a non-aligned state working towards its version of socialism and self-reliance under the leadership of Julius Nyerere acted as a magnet for academics of a radical persuasion, including other geographers from the UK and USA. Sharp (2019: 89) has noted this 'was not a simple case of Westernized knowledge coming to Tanzania and colonizing debates; many of the Western academics and the debates they took back home were profoundly Tanzanian-ized'. For Santos it was an opportunity to refine his ideas about underdevelopment, whilst experiencing at first hand a socialist development agenda at large, exemplifying the South 'theorizing back' (to use a term from David Slater). Significant here is how Santos was part of a whole constellation of international scholars, including notable numbers from beyond the West, who were drawn to Dar-es-Salaam (and other African universities). Works of translation like *For a New Geography* therefore serve an important role in reminding us that geography's history has always been much more diverse than is often given credit, specifically within the English language canon. It also demonstrates how a simple acknowledgement at the end of a book can shed light on career trajectories, academic mobilities, as well as sites of knowledge production that were vital and vibrant in the mid-late twentieth century, many of which still require further attention.

Indeed, Santos's dedication and acknowledgements in *For a New Geography* also remind us of other lives that remain much harder to access and understand as part of the process of diversifying geography's histories. On finishing the book I was left wondering who are Lygia Ferraro, Antonia Dea Erdens and Maria Auxiliadora da Silva? These are names that appear in the dedication and acknowledgements but none are cited in the text – in fact hardly any women are – which is maybe unsurprising in a book that focuses in large part on excavating and problematising geography's intellectual legacies, i.e.

the ideas of men. While translations of key works that would otherwise remain unacknowledged by the Anglosphere are a vital piece in a complex and unfinished jigsaw in terms of enabling anglophone geographers to pluralise their histories, works like this also highlight gaps that still need to be addressed. Undoubtedly this is hard to do when faced with a period in time when women geographers were fewer in number, less widely published and often under-credited. But this work is not beyond the realms of possibility and should not be ignored as part of the project of decolonising geography.

This leads to a final point, again related to citation practices and why we should pay attention to whose ideas are seen to matter. *For a New Geography* certainly does help to underline how geography's history has been multi-national and multi-lingual, and Santos clearly digested a diet of work by geographers from different parts of the globe to inform his writing. However, what it also reveals is the need to exert some caution, and to resist the urge to project present expectations and preoccupations on the past. While Santos acknowledges the time he spent at the University of Dar-es-Salaam and uses occasional examples from Africa there is a distinct lack of African geographers in the book. A notable exception to this is Akin L. Mabogunje, a Nigerian geographer who, by the time *For a New Geography* was published, was an internationally renowned scholar – which was, and remains, an exception when it comes to African geographers.

One reason behind this absence of African geographers can be explained by Santos's obvious scepticism about 'applied geography' and geography's quantitative revolution. For him 'As geography becomes more and more utilitarian, it becomes less and less explanatory' (Santos 2021 [1978]: 68). This reveals a rift between the radical Santos and a lot of the geographical research that was emerging from many geography departments in decolonising African countries from the mid-1960s onwards. In many African departments, applied geography and distinct interests in population, natural resource management, and big development projects (dams, roads, national capitals) were dominant, understood as part of geography's contribution to 'national development' (see Mamdani, 2011 for critiques of this).

Acknowledging this applied geography is important today. Clayton (2021: 12) has remarked on the ‘resurgence of interest in the spatial ideas and practices of 20th-century anti-colonial, anti-capitalist, antiracist, feminist and intersectional thinkers and activists (some of them geographers) – such as James Blaut, WEB Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Angela Davies, Frantz Fanon, Audre Lorde, George Padmore, Cedric Robinson, Walter Rodney and Milton Santos, to name just some of the most prominent.’ These might be the radicals that we are looking to and for today, though Santos did not write about them in the late 1970s, nor was he really writing about the research of African geographers. Reading *For a New Geography* therefore reveals how it is important to tread carefully when excavating the not-so-distant past of the discipline, and looking to the past for inspiration for geography’s future. It is important to reorient views and outlooks that have been firmly Anglocentric for too long. However, it is also worth remembering, whilst we grapple today with how to redraw and redefine the boundaries of our disciplinary histories, that geography in the 1970s came in many guises, and Milton Santos’s radical ‘new geography’ is one expression of this.


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